

## ***Philomathes***

### **“A woman, a youth, an ephebe, a boy”: Reinterpreting the *Notha Mulier* of Catullus 63**

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In the past several years, new research through the lens of gender and transgender studies has significantly advanced scholarly understandings, in Roman thought and society, of the *Galli*, the feminine-presenting eunuch priest(esse)s of Cybele. Roscoe compares the *Galli* to the third-gender *Hijras* of the Indian subcontinent,<sup>1</sup> while Latham argues that the *Galli* served as a foil to conventional Roman thoughts on their own masculinity.<sup>2</sup> More recently, Adkins argues that there was a disconnect between in- and out-group perspectives on the *Galli*, and that they existed as a community of self-identified transfeminine individuals unrecognized by broader society, a paradigm she highlights in the novels *Onos* and *The Golden Ass*.<sup>3</sup> The poetry of Catullus, however, gives significant attention to the gender status of the Gallic priesthood. In particular,

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<sup>1</sup> Will Roscoe, “Priests of the Goddess: Gender Transgression in Ancient Religion,” *History of Religions* 35 (1996), pp. 195-230.

<sup>2</sup> “From its importation to its disappearance in late antiquity, Roman authors employed the manufactured alterity of the Metroac cult to fashion Roman masculine identities.” Jacob Latham, “Fabulous Clap-Trap’: Roman Masculinity, the Cult of Magna Mater, and Literary Constructions of the *galli* at Rome from the Late Republic to Late Antiquity,” *The Journal of Religion* (2012), p. 93.

<sup>3</sup> “In their own words, the priests of the Syrian Goddess in the *Onos* and *The Golden Ass* identify as girls — a community of transwomen sheltered within an imported religion on the margins of Graeco-Roman society. In both novels, however, the priests’ genders are redefined by Lucius, who uses their speech, voices, dress, and actions to characterize them as the perverted *cinaedi* and foreign *galli* of Greek and Roman literature.” Evelyn Adkins, “The Politics of Transgender Representation in Apuleius’ *The Golden Ass* and *Loukios, or the Ass*,” in A. Surtees and J. Dyer, *Exploring Gender Diversity in the Ancient World* (2020), p. 168.

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*Carmen* 63, perhaps the longest surviving account of a *Gallus* from the period, demonstrates a profound awareness of, and interest in, the *Gallus*' – or *Galla*'s – femininity, as well as the ambiguities and contradictions inherent to their gender and role in broader Roman society. Moving from masculine descriptors to feminine descriptors to a mixture thereof over the course of the poem, Catullus constructs an Attis of profoundly contradictory gender roles, and thus entirely removed from Roman gender norms, as a reflection of his own gender anxieties.

The opening of the poem seems to draw particular attention to Attis' initial maleness. While the name "Attis" is ambiguously masculine or feminine (although when coupled with Catullus' emphasis on Attis' Greek origin, the name could be read as a nod at the word "Atthis," "Athenian woman"<sup>4</sup>), Catullus' first line describes Attis as *vectus*, "he was borne."<sup>5</sup> Likewise, in describing Attis' impulse to come to Cybele's service, Catullus uses *stimulatus*, "he was incited."<sup>6</sup> Even at the moment of castration, it is possible to read Attis as masculine: the interpretation of *ili*, in the line Catullus describes the act,<sup>7</sup> is rather uncertain. Wray supports reading it as the genitive singular of *ilium*, the otherwise unattested singular form of *ilia* roughly meaning "groin," within the Catullan corpus,<sup>8</sup> but suggests that the reconstructed nominative may instead be *ile*,

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<sup>4</sup> Ruurd R. Nauta, "Catullus 63 in a Roman Context", *Mnemosyne* 55 (2004), p. 600.

<sup>5</sup> Catullus, 63.1; henceforth the *Carmina* shall be referred to by poem and line numbers only. Translations mine except where stated otherwise.

<sup>6</sup> 63.4.

<sup>7</sup> 13.5: *vagus animis devolvit ili acuto sibi pondera silice*. Note that *vagus* is another masculine adjective.

<sup>8</sup> David Wray, in "Attis' Groin Weights", *Classical Philology* 96.2 (2001), p. 121, referencing Martial 7.35.4.

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making *ili* an ablative of separation.<sup>9</sup> However, the meter allows the penultima of *ili* to be long, and *pondera*, albeit in the singular, is attested on its own as a euphemism for the testicles (e.g., in Martial<sup>10</sup>) and the plural form immediately recalls the visually similar weights of a loom.<sup>11</sup> The word thus might instead be emended as *ille*, leading to two possible interpretations of the line: “[Attis] cast down the weights from their<sup>12</sup> groin with a sharp flint,” or “he cast down his ‘weights’ with a sharp flint.” The latter emendation emphasizes that Attis is masculine right until the moment of castration. Whichever reading is accepted, however, Catullus strongly emphasizes Attis’ maleness throughout the poem’s opening.

That emphasis, however, sharply reverses immediately after Attis’ castration, after which Catullus switches to entirely female identifiers. Catullus describes them, using the feminine, as *citata*,<sup>13</sup> “[she is] swift” — the “swiftness” Attis now has perhaps recalling the weight they have shed — and uses *haec*, not *hic*, as their pronoun at 63.11. 63.11 also describes them with the feminine adjectives *adorta* and *tremebunda*. The entire Cybelean priest(ess)hood is described in feminine terms as well: Catullus consistently uses *Gallae*, not the more common *Galli*.<sup>14</sup> Although Catullus uses masculine predicates later in the poem — *ego mulier*, *ego adulescens*, *ego ephebus*, *ego puer*<sup>15</sup> (“I a woman, I a youth, I an epebe, I a boy”); *ego vir sterilis ero?*,<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> In general, I will prefer to use “they” as a singular gender-neutral pronoun to describe Attis outside of direct translation and when translating lines where the linguistic gender a name adopts is unclear.

<sup>13</sup> 63.8.

<sup>14</sup> 63.12.

<sup>15</sup> 63.63.

<sup>16</sup> 63.69.

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("shall I be a sterile man?") — feminine grammatical features describing Attis remain the norm until the very beginning of their soliloquy. Even as Attis begins to regret their loss of a male, Greek identity, Catullus uses a feminine form to describe them — *maesta est*<sup>17</sup> ("she grieved") — hinting at Attis' ambiguous femininity even as the character's own view becomes rather more uncertain. It is clear, therefore, that Catullus views Attis as essentially feminine between their castration and lament.

Beginning with their lament, however, masculine and feminine descriptions of Attis coexist. They describe themselves in the soliloquy with a mixture of masculine and feminine identifiers, using the masculine *miser* at 63.51 and *mulier*, *adulescens*, *epeheus*, and *puer* at 63.63 (see below). Subsequently, Cybele herself appears to use masculine terms for post-castration Attis, at the moment that they doubt their commitment to the goddess' cult: on witnessing Attis' apparent rejection, she orders her lions to further goad them into returning: '*Agedum,*' *inquit*, '*age ferox i, fac ut **hunc** furor agitet*'<sup>18</sup> ("drive now", she said, 'go drive, fierce one, make it that fury rouses **him**'). It is possible, of course, that this represents a corruption of *hanc*, but this seems unlikely: the manuscript tradition shows just the opposite tendency, with the manuscripts containing, at 63.88 and 63.89 respectively, *tenerum* instead of *teneram* and *ille* instead of *illa*.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Green argues that even these feminine emendations may be suspect (i.e., that, given Attis' regret at becoming a *Galla*, it

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<sup>17</sup> 63.49.

<sup>18</sup> 63.78.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Green, *The Poems of Catullus: a Bilingual Edition* (2007), p. 239.

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makes sense for the language describing them to revert to the masculine).<sup>20</sup> In light of these textual difficulties, it is difficult to comment with any certainty on any of the masculine and feminine forms in the poem's concluding lines, though the use of both the aforementioned *hunc* and the feminine predicate *famula*,<sup>21</sup> neither of them contested, make it clear that both masculine and feminine signifiers occur in this section. The use of *Attin* at 63.88 also strongly suggests the Greek feminine form, particularly if the aforementioned association with *Atthis* is accepted, though if *tenerum* is accepted over *teneram* it must be masculine. Regardless of accepted reading, however, the conclusion of the text undoubtedly contains both masculine and feminine endings and predicates.

In light of this textual uncertainty, the further emendation of *hanc* instead of *hunc* seems impossibly tenuous. It is possible that *hunc* refers not to Attis at all, but to the *reditum* anticipated in the next line, in which case the sense would be "move now, fierce one, move, go and make it that fury rouses this, that [they] struck by fury take up a return to the groves."<sup>22</sup> This is quite unlikely: the reading of *furor* rousing a person seems much more sensible than rousing a *reditum*, and in any event the *furor* strongly recalls the *furenti rabie* affecting Attis at 63.4. Thus, reading *hunc* as referring to Attis seems the most probable interpretation. This use of the masculine, however, greatly contextualizes the use of the feminine

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<sup>20</sup> This argument may suffice to explain why *hunc* occurs as mentioned instead of *hanc*, but it is difficult to see why this would persist once Attis is re-incited at the poem's end: their mental state at the opening of the poem, when they are *stimulatus furenti rabie*, "driven by furious madness," (63.4) seems quite parallel to their being *demens*, "mindless," (63.89) at the end.

<sup>21</sup> 63.90.

<sup>22</sup> 63.78-9.

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elsewhere. It is notable that it comes at the nadir of Attis' commitment to Cybele, after their long lament at their abandonment of a male, Hellenic life, and that it is Cybele herself who uses it. The goddess, as the supreme arbiter of Gallic status, decides that it is at this moment that Attis has ceased to require feminine terms, a decision that is not overturned until Attis is once again driven (*demens*) to return to the Goddess' service, and once again becomes her *famula*.

There are, therefore, two distinct points at which a transition in gendered language occurs within Catullus 63: Attis' castration and their loss of commitment to being a *Galla*.<sup>23</sup> Their initial castration, furthermore, seems to have been a consequence of, not a cause for, their desire to serve Cybele: Attis only undertakes the act "driven by furious madness,"<sup>24</sup> and they immediately join Cybele's cult while still bleeding from their wounds.<sup>25</sup> Conversely, they reacquire masculine grammar not at the moment that they regret their loss of masculinity, a point when they nonetheless retain feminine grammar,<sup>26</sup> but rather at the moment that they become so divorced from Cybelean worship that they lose their desire — albeit a desire Catullus terms *furor* (i.e., "fury") or *furens rabies* (i.e., "furious madness") to associate with the Cybelean cult, requiring Cybele to once again instill that same desire within them.<sup>27</sup> Once that association returns, Attis is once again described with the apparently, but uncertainly, feminine *Attin* and the definitely

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<sup>23</sup> It is reasonable to argue there is in fact a third transition point when they return to Cybele's service, but in light of the textual uncertainty surrounding the passage it is difficult to trace such a turning point with any certainty.

<sup>24</sup> 63.4.

<sup>25</sup> 63.7.

<sup>26</sup> 63.49: *adlocuta maesta est*.

<sup>27</sup> 63.78.

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feminine *famula*. Thus, there would appear to be two necessary conditions under which the Catullan Attis becomes feminine: the physical condition of castration, and the social condition of Cybelean worship. The *Galla*, within Catullus, therefore occupies a feminine role, and requires the use of feminine grammar, not by virtue of merely being a eunuch, but specifically by their identification with, and participation in, the cult of Cybele. As a result, Gallic femininity is essentially contingent, and exists against the backdrop of a potential return to masculine identifiers.

Attis' femininity within *Carmen* 63, however, is not merely indicated by grammatical endings, but further explored, elaborated, and contextualized by Catullus' description of Attis throughout the poem. Immediately following their castration, they *relicta sensit sibi membra sine viro*<sup>28</sup> ("feel their cut-off members, without man-ness"), the use of *viro* indicating a loss of manhood in an essential, as well as physical, sense. Soon afterwards they are described as having *niveis manibus* ("snow-white hands"), a skin tone specifically associated with femininity and female beauty in Catullus — he describes an unnamed lover of Caecilius, for example, as *candida*<sup>29</sup> — and in Latin poetry more widely.<sup>30</sup> Similar descriptions of Attis' features in strikingly feminine language persist throughout the remainder of the poem — they have *teneris digitis*<sup>31</sup> ("tender fingers") and *roseis labellis*<sup>32</sup> ("rosy lips"), the latter characterization shared with

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<sup>28</sup> 63.6.

<sup>29</sup> 35.8.

<sup>30</sup> Ovid, for example, describes Galatea as *Candidior folio nivei...ligustri*, "whiter than the pale privet" (*Met.* 13.789), and elsewhere speaks of *piae matres*, "pious matrons" with *nivea corpora*, "pale bodies" (*Met.* 10.431-2).

<sup>31</sup> 63.10.

<sup>32</sup> 63.74.

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Septimius' lover Acme.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the latter description occurs at the conclusion of their lament (i.e., *roseis ut huic labellis sonitus citus abiit*<sup>34</sup>), confirming that a feminine description of Attis persists even as their willingness to associate with Cybele's cult, (and their grammatical femininity) reaches its nadir. Hence, although the grammatical gender applied to Attis varies throughout the poem, their description otherwise remains consistently feminine throughout its length.<sup>35</sup>

Nonetheless, Catullus' description of Attis' identity and role are not without ambiguity. Perhaps the most prominent of these uncertainties is found at 63.27, where Attis is described as a *notha mulier*. This line has often been taken as a denial of Attis' femininity: Green, for instance, renders the predicate as "woman no woman," and Lee translates it to "false female."<sup>36</sup> It is unnecessary, however, to take *notha* as such a strongly negative qualifier. While the word in its general meaning can be taken as "bastard" or "false", it may also have the more neutral sense of "mixed" or "hybridized."<sup>37</sup> It is therefore premature to conclude that *notha*, as Catullus uses it, is indeed a negation of

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<sup>33</sup> 45.12.

<sup>34</sup> 63.74: as they shouted from their rosy lips they swiftly departed this place.

<sup>35</sup> These lines are rather brief, but this is not unusual within Catullus, even when describing unambiguously feminine characters. Even in the poems most pervaded by imagery and physicality (cf. 3.18, 61.21-22, 64.63,65), images of the female form are rare within the *Carmina*, and frequently serve to describe an action or emotional state as well as — or instead of — emphasizing feminine beauty. Thus, the sparseness of Catullus' references to Attis' appearance — references that likewise occur only when describing their actions, speaking or playing the tympanum — is neither unusual of Catullus nor indicative of any lack of femininity on Attis' part.

<sup>36</sup> Guy Lee, *Catullus: The Complete Poems* (2008), p. 77.

<sup>37</sup> *Nothus* is a loanword from the Greek νοθος, defined by the *LSJ* as the child of a slave or concubine. The *OLD* (1968) notes that its meaning can be "bastard," but can also have a sense as neutral as "cross-bred" or "mixed".



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Attis' being a *mulier*: the meaning of the term is ambiguous, and it can equally be taken to imply that Attis is a woman of unusual origins, or with hybrid male and female characteristics, so as to imply that they are not a woman at all. While it is difficult to speculate as to the author's intent, the use of *falsa* would have much more clearly conveyed the sense of negation taken by Green and Lee and would be metrically equivalent. More concretely, the "mixed" or "uncertain" sense of *notha* corresponds quite well to the single other use of *mulier* within the text, in which it is placed in an uneasy coexistence with seemingly contradictory identities: *ego mulier, ego adulescens, ego ephebus, ego puer, ego gymnasi fui flos, ego eram decus olei*<sup>38</sup> ("I a woman, I a youth, I an ephebe, I a boy, I have been the flower of the gymnasium, I was the glory of the oil"<sup>39</sup>)." While these lines are undoubtedly biographical, it is difficult to determine the chronology of the line, that is, which of these identities coexist or succeed others at any given moment in Attis' history. Undoubtedly, the *ego mulier* it begins with should be taken as present sense, but the line then neatly flows through *ego adulescens, ego ephebus, ego puer* before the unambiguously past time statements of the following line. It is possible, following Green, to take these latter three as chronological, describing a development from *puer* to *mulier* as an irregular parallel of the expected change from *puer* to *vir*, but there is no grammatical reason why this should be the case, and no clear indication of which predicates are in the present and which are in the past. The lines might instead be read as a series of coexisting and yet contradictory identities: Attis is

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<sup>38</sup> 63.63-4.

<sup>39</sup> Green, *The Poems of Catullus*, p.131 takes this as a reference to athletics, due to the practice of exercising under a layer of oil.

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many or all of these things at the time of speaking, possessing a set of mixed and seemingly exclusive identities — a “mixed-ness” that *notha*, in the sense that it describes something of hybrid or unclear origins, reinforces. It is reasonable to read this as concessive: *mulier* is an adult identity that must leave behind the childlike statuses of *adulescens*, *ephebus*, and *puer*. At the same time, however, the grammar of the line nowhere suggests a clear distinction between past and present, implying the coexistence, rather than succession, of seemingly exclusive identities. In light of this second usage of *mulier*, therefore, it is difficult to take the prior *notha* as implying that Attis cannot be a woman. Rather, Catullus uses the adjective to contextualize and draw attention to the inherent contradictions of Attis’ transformation and coming of age.

Catullus’ usage of *notha mulier*, therefore, does not wholly deny *that* Attis is a woman, but rather emphasizes the complexity and ambiguity of that status. That complexity is further reinforced by the roles Attis, and their companions, take on throughout the poem, both literally (i.e., their status towards their fellow followers and their goddess) and figuratively (i.e., the metaphors Catullus attaches to them during the course of the narrative). Frequently, these roles are essentially feminine: beyond the *mulier* already mentioned, Attis is elsewhere a *iuvenca*<sup>40</sup> (a “heifer”), a *famula*<sup>41</sup> (a “slave-girl”), and a *ministra* (a “lady-in-waiting”). That is not to mention the references to Attis herself, their companions, or the *Gallae* generally as *maenades*,<sup>42</sup> a vivid mythological and literary reference that has

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<sup>40</sup> 63.33. Ovid uses the same term of Helen, in *Her.* 5.117-8,124, having Oenone jealously describe her as a *Graia iuvenca*.

<sup>41</sup> 63.68, 90.

<sup>42</sup> 63.23, 69.

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been the object of much scholarly attention.<sup>43</sup> Simultaneously, however, the characters in question take on a variety of stereotypically, if not intrinsically, male descriptors. Attis is a *dux* and their companions, their *comites*.<sup>44</sup> Collectively, they form a single *cohors*.<sup>45</sup> Later, when Attis bemoans that they will subsequently be a *maenas*, they refer to themselves simultaneously as destined to be a *vir sterilis*,<sup>46</sup> a rather more unambiguous use of the masculine terms in uneasy coexistence with an ultimate (inescapable?) feminine identity. The secondary identifiers within *Carmen* 63, therefore, further deepen the complexity of Attis' identity. They are ultimately unable to escape their femininity, but the actions they take are highly unusual for any woman, and are characterized in unusually masculine ways. While Attis seems predominantly feminine to Catullus, at least at some moments and in some contexts (otherwise he surely would not so persistently use the feminine forms), their actions and identity are nonetheless a confused and uncertain — in short, *notha* — mixture of masculine and feminine qualifiers.

It is in this context, therefore — of an Attis simultaneously retaining feminine grammatical description and ambiguously transgressing the boundaries of gender — that Attis' self-doubting monologue must be read. The lament, of course, does not merely touch on issues of gender: indeed, it opens by bewailing their separation from their homeland — “Oh, country my creator, oh, country that gave me birth, how

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Stephen Harrison, “Altering Attis’: Ethnicity, Gender, and Genre in Catullus 63”, *Mnemosyne* 57 (2004) pp. 520-33.

<sup>44</sup> 63.15.

<sup>45</sup> 63.25.

<sup>46</sup> 63.69.

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miserable am I, since I abandoned you...".<sup>47</sup> Indeed, only a few lines (i.e., 62-4<sup>48</sup> and 69<sup>49</sup>) of the lament clearly refer to gender at all. Nonetheless, the loss of gender and loss of homeland are deeply intertwined. Via the use of the Greek-derived *ephebus* and the references to the "flower of the gymnasium ... the glory of [athletic] oil,"<sup>50</sup> Attis clearly establishes that the status they have lost is not merely masculinity, but a tightly knit nexus of upper-class, Greek, masculine status. Nauta further suggests that the following line — *mihi floridis corollis redimita domus erat* ("my house was garlanded with woven flowers")<sup>51</sup> — be taken as a euphemistic description of an *eromenos* on the verge of reaching adulthood and, with it, sexual agency.<sup>52</sup> Attis' transformation, therefore, is not merely one from maleness to femaleness, but from Greekness to barbarian, from sexually protected and empowered,<sup>53</sup> to quite literally neutered, and from freedom to servility ("shall I now be a helper of the gods and a servant-girl of Cybele?"<sup>54</sup>). At the same time, furthermore, the lament seems to mourn not merely the loss of masculinity, but the fundamental uncertainty of Attis' condition:

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<sup>47</sup> 63.50-1.

<sup>48</sup> 63.62-4: *Quod enim genus figuraest ego non quod obierim? Ego mulier, ego adolescens, ego ephebus, ego puer, ego gymnasi fui flos, ego eram decus olei.* "What sort of form is there, that I've not adopted? I a woman, I a youth, I an ephebe, I a boy, I was the flower of the gymnasium, I was the glory of the oil."

<sup>49</sup> 63.69: *Ego maenas, ego mei pars, ego vir sterilis ero?* "I a maenad, I a part of me, shall I be a sterile man?"

<sup>50</sup> 63.64.

<sup>51</sup> 63.65.

<sup>52</sup> Nauta, "Catullus 63 in a Roman Context," p. 605.

<sup>53</sup> Although both an *eromenos* and a *mulier* are expected to take the passive role in sexual activity, for the *eromenos* this is only a temporary phase that anticipates development to a sexually active adult, rather than a permanent status.

<sup>54</sup> 63.68.

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"what sort of form is there, that I've not adopted?"<sup>55</sup> Their bitterness is not merely that they are female, but that the change they have undertaken has resulted in a loss of status of any sort within Greco-Roman society: Attis is neither a freeborn man nor a respectable woman capable of existing within the confines of marriage, and therefore can occupy no social niche except that of a de-Hellenized slave of a barbarian goddess. Thus, while the language of the poem consistently confirms Attis' femininity, the content of the lament further expands on Attis' social role: they are both an essentially feminine character, following their transformation, but simultaneously incapable of existing within the norms of Greco-Roman gender expectations.

Perhaps the most interesting comparison for Attis' monologue, however, is that of Catullus' Ariadne, whose narrative is given in the immediately adjacent poem 64. Catullus' telling of the two myths creates a parallel between the characters that could hardly be stronger if it were made explicit. Female monologues, indeed, female speech of any sort, are a rarity within the *Carmina*: usually, the poet's love interest is essentially silent, a choice that seems to be both conscious and deliberate on Catullus' part. Catullus rarely privileges female voices;<sup>56</sup> speaking female characters, while not absent, are quite rare within the *Carmina*. It appears very significant, then,

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<sup>55</sup> 63.62.

<sup>56</sup> This is evident in *Carmen* 51, Catullus' translation of Sappho 31 LP. While as Sinos ("Sappho, fr. 31 LP: Structure and Context", in *Aevum* 56 (1982), pp. 25-6) points out, the Sapphic original contains a conversational action between the male and female speaker, Catullus condenses the entirety of the paired action to a woman *dulce ridentem*, "sweetly giggling" (51.5), an insubstantive reaction of an otherwise mute character. Similar reactivity is seen in *Carmen* 61, as the female chorus vocalizes only in response to the male chorus' own song.

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that the two narrative *carmina*, the transformation of Attis in 63 and the epyllion of 64, both center a female or quasi-female monologue, the former that of Attis<sup>57</sup> and the latter that of Ariadne.<sup>58</sup> The circumstances of each are remarkably similar. Both figures stand on a beach, Attis “there gazing at the endless sea with tear-filled eyes, spoke to her homeland thus, miserable and with mournful voice ...,”<sup>59</sup> Ariadne who “rushed into the oncoming briny surf, hiking up her soft garment from her naked thighs ... cried [to Theseus] ....”<sup>60</sup> Both lament their separation from their homelands: Ariadne cries out that Theseus has left her “snatched away from her ancestral altars,”<sup>61</sup> and Attis directly addresses “oh fatherland my creator, oh fatherland who gave me birth ....”<sup>62</sup> Of course, the two laments then begin to differ, as the characters reflect on different experiences, but further parallels abound between the two. Both figures are described in Dionysiac terms, despite that terminology not being fully apt:<sup>63</sup> Attis and their followers are *Maenades*,<sup>64</sup> while Ariadne is “stony, like a statue of a Bacchant.”<sup>65</sup> Both dread the impossibility of their return home, though Attis is slightly more uncertain. Ariadne bemoans that “there’s no exit offered by the surrounding breakers of the sea, no chance at flight, no hope...”<sup>66</sup>, while Attis dreads that they shall perhaps

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<sup>57</sup> 63.50-73.

<sup>58</sup> 64.131-201.

<sup>59</sup> 63.48-9.

<sup>60</sup> 64.128-31.

<sup>61</sup> 64.132.

<sup>62</sup> 63.50.

<sup>63</sup> Cybele, of course, is a separate deity to Bacchus. Ariadne later marries the god, but that reference at this point in the text seems too premature to not be taken as significant.

<sup>64</sup> 63.23, 69.

<sup>65</sup> 64.61.

<sup>66</sup> 64.185-6.

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forevermore “exist among these woods far-off from [their] home.”<sup>67</sup> Ariadne, furthermore, deliberates whether to — or urges herself to — “seek out the Idan hills[,] whence the fearsome open ocean separates [me] as it splits the ferocity of the sea by a wide vortex.”<sup>68</sup> The pondered journey directly recalls that of Attis, “borne over the deep”<sup>69</sup> to Mt. Ida. Though Ariadne is probably speaking of the Cretan Ida, rather than the Anatolian Ida where *Carmen* 63 takes place,<sup>70</sup> the parallel remains striking. The next line, about following a youth stained with blood,<sup>71</sup> less specifically reflects Attis’ journey, but nonetheless further recalls the bloodstains they leave when wandering after their own castration.<sup>72</sup> Later, when Ariadne recounts her grievances against Theseus, she describes herself as *amenti caeca furore*<sup>73</sup> (“blind with mindless fury”) recalling the *furor* that drives Attis.<sup>74</sup> The two narratives thus deeply interconnect with one another. While Attis laments their abandonment of their masculinity, the lament itself directly parallels Ariadne’s lament at her own abandonment by Theseus. Even as Attis calls their gender and identity into question, therefore, the monologue itself is intimately tied to the only other such speech of a woman within the *Carmina*. Thus, the structure and format of the monologue invite us to read it as a fundamentally feminine act within the text, despite the ambiguity it introduces as to Attis’ own identity.

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<sup>67</sup> 63.58.

<sup>68</sup> 64.178-9.

<sup>69</sup> 63.1.

<sup>70</sup> 63.30, 52, 70.

<sup>71</sup> 64.181: *respersum iuvenem fraterna caede secuta*. “following a youth splashed with brotherly blood.”

<sup>72</sup> 63.7.

<sup>73</sup> 64.197.

<sup>74</sup> 63.4.

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Throughout *Carmen* 63, therefore, there is a seeming contradiction within Attis' identity, and by extension that of the *Galli* as a whole. Unlike in virtually all other sources,<sup>75</sup> *Gallae* in Catullus are consistently referred to in the feminine and with feminine descriptions, and consistently adopt feminine roles. Indeed, the conclusion of the poem seems to suggest that a return to masculinity is impossible, that as a result of Cybele's intervention: "once a *Galla*, always a *Galla*." At the same time, the *Galla* is emphatically unable to adopt the roles expected of a Greek or Roman woman, and amongst themselves the *Gallae* simultaneously adopt both masculine and feminine roles (and likewise a mixture of masculine and feminine grammatical forms). At one moment, they are *famulae* ("handmaidens"), at the next, a *cohors*, despite being unable to fit into either category. As individuals and a group, they are women as long as they remain in Cybele's service, while simultaneously possessing incongruous masculine and feminine identities.

How, then, can this apparent contradiction — the simultaneously intrinsic femininity and inescapable ambiguity of the pious *Galla*'s gender — be explained? Some have argued that it is self-reflective, that Catullus' Attis is fundamentally a reflection of the author's own fear of his emasculation by his lover: "It has often been felt that Attis is in a sense an allegory for Catullus, and Cybele for Lesbia: like Attis, Catullus was brought out of his mind by a dominant female, like him he tried to free himself from her sway, and like him without success."<sup>76</sup> Nonetheless, this approach seems tenuous considering several

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<sup>75</sup> Nauta, "Catullus 63 in a Roman Context," p. 602. Only a single other source — a Hellenistic, Galliambic fragment, perhaps of Callimachus — is comparable in this respect.

<sup>76</sup> Nauta, "Catullus 63 in a Roman Context," p. 598.



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details of the Catullan corpus. According to Nauta, the language of insanity and slavery with which Catullus characterizes Attis' relationship to Cybele is without parallel in how he describes his relationship to Lesbia, and, following this interpretation, "it is difficult to account for the central motif of self-castration, undertaken *Veneris nimio odio*, 'out of excessive loathing of sex.'" Therefore, while it is impossible to disprove that Catullus' own anxieties lead to the creation of *Carmen* 63, it is difficult to reconcile the poem with the others in which those anxieties are expressed.

Rather, the Attis narrative seems far more to engage with the themes of Catullus' poetry more generally, that is, human sexuality and relationships. Nauta suggests this interpretation, despite ultimately moving away from it,<sup>77</sup> noting that all the other *carmina maiora* explicitly deal with the theme of marriage and suggesting that Attis' transformation represents a sort of antithesis to marriage. Within and extending from this interpretation, the Attis narrative and the identity of the *Gallae* provides Catullus with a way to explore the complete inversion of his ordinary themes. Obviously, the vast majority of Catullus' work deals explicitly with love and lust, whether it be a poem exploring his own love for Lesbia, the consequences of that desire in himself or others, or a description of the motif of a marriage. Furthermore, the *carmina* as a whole almost exclusively exist within Roman sexual and gender binaries. While homosexual acts are occasionally described, perhaps most notoriously at *Carmen* 16, they exist entirely within the confines of a penetrator-penetrated dynamic, with, for example, the active Catullus imposing himself on "Aurelius the sodomite

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<sup>77</sup> Nauta, "Catullus 63 in Roman Context," p. 597.

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and faggoty Furus.”<sup>78</sup> Throughout the *carmina*, the norm of a sexually active male interacting from a position of dominance with a sexually passive inferior, be it another man or a woman, is hardly questioned.

*Carmen* 63, however, represents a dramatic exception to this norm. As discussed, Attis represents a dramatic transgression of ordinary gender boundaries, while simultaneously existing entirely outside the ordinary gender categories of Greco-Roman society. Furthermore, they are one of few characters in the *Carmina* to exist non-sexually. Having lost their “manhood,” they cannot take on an active role in sex; existing only among fellow *Gallae* who are also castrated, they do not take on a passive role either. Indeed, having chosen to become a priestess *Veneris nimio odio*, “out of too much hatred of Venus [i.e. sex],”<sup>79</sup> Attis exists entirely beyond the ordinary emotions that Catullus sees in his fellow humans and that occupy the vast majority of his corpus. Thus, instead of developing from a sexually receptive *eromenos* to either a sexually passive woman or a sexually active man, Attis has uniquely become a non-sexual individual. Likewise, they have found a way to exist completely removed from the ordinary gender binary in which this pattern exists, becoming a woman who nonetheless exists between and beyond the ordinary roles of roman gender categories.

Attis’ ambiguous characterization, I argue, thus serves two purposes within this reading. First, it emphasizes the degree of alteration Catullus sees as required to reach this non-sexual state: the man must abandon not only his status and culture to

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<sup>78</sup> 16.2.

<sup>79</sup> 63.17.

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reach it, but also his manliness, in the most literal sense possible. Second, it emphasizes the degree to which sexual agency and masculinity are intrinsically linked within Catullus' work. While Catullus responds to anxiety about being emasculated by his relationship with Lesbia with a vigorous reassertion of his own masculinity and sexual agency (as visible in *carmen* 16), *carmen* 63 may represent a far deeper anxiety: that of losing his ability or willingness to occupy that role at all. He may fear the possibility of falling victim to the same *Veneris nimium odium* that made Attis an exile and slave, rather than merely that his relationship with Lesbia may not conform perfectly to Roman social expectations. This, it would seem, is the root anxiety of his final, desperate prayer to Cybele: "far from my own house be all your fury, Lady. Drive others frenzied, drive others rabid."<sup>80</sup> The prayer reflects a deep anxiety within the poem as a whole: not that his particular relationship with Lesbia might not conform to social expectations, but that his ability to meet those expectations might indeed be more provisional than he would like to think. The Attis narrative, in other words, reflects an anxiety deeply rooted in the fragility of his own sociosexual status far more than a simple fear of his particular relationship not living up to that norm. In reflecting on that anxiety, in turn, Catullus presents a view of the *Gallae* that confirms a conscious understanding of the priesthood as removed from the ordinary boundaries of Roman gender categorization and likewise the ordinary themes of Catullus' work.

Aiden Mattingly  
Middlebury College  
amattingly@brynmawr.edu

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<sup>80</sup> 63.92.

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